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# Intelligence Data Suggest That Reagan Overstated Pace of Soviet Military Buildup

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WASHINGTON—U.S. intelligence agencies during the past year have released politically sensitive—though little noted—evidence that the military buildup by the Soviet Union in the late 1970s wasn't as great as had been thought.

The revised intelligence estimates challenge the argument, made frequently by the Reagan administration in lobbying for higher U.S. defense budgets, that Soviet arms spending soared during the late 1970s while the U.S. let its defenses slip. President Reagan reiterated the theme in a radio address this month when he criticized his Democratic rival Walter Mondale for opposing "American military strength during the 1970s, even as the Soviets were embarking on the most massive military buildup in history."

Recent data, from the Defense Intelligence Agency, show that a flat trend in Soviet military procurement, first reported in a little-noticed Central Intelligence Agency analysis last year, continued from 1977 through 1982. The DIA and CIA data are discussed in an article by Richard Kaufman, assistant director of the congressional Joint Economic Committee, that will be published in November in the journal "Soviet Economy."

## Production Rates Fell

The DIA estimates suggest that "level or falling rates of production are found in most categories of weapons" from 1977 through 1982, Mr. Kaufman writes. Specifically, he notes, Soviet production rates fell for intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, ballistic-missile submarines, and most types of aircraft. These DIA estimates were provided to Congress in August and printed in the Congressional Record.

However, the DIA's preliminary estimates for 1983 suggest that the Soviets may have sharply increased their military spending last year after six years of slow growth. These preliminary results indicate that total Soviet military spending, measured in constant dollars, increased by between 5% and 10% last year over the 1982 level, in contrast to the previous growth rate of about 2% per year.

The changing intelligence estimates on Soviet defense spending could add to the skepticism already apparent on Capitol Hill toward the Reagan administration's bolstered military outlays.

## Disturbing Picture

Despite the slowdown in Soviet procurement during the late 1970s, many U.S. analysts of Soviet affairs believe the Kremlin maintained a menacing military buildup. One important reason for the Soviet slowdown in the late 1970s, they note, was that Moscow had added so many weapons during the early 1970s. So the revised intelligence estimates don't necessarily mean that the U.S. needn't increase its own defense spending, they say.

But the expert findings do suggest that some of the arguments that Mr. Reagan used during the 1980 presidential campaign and later in framing his defense and arms-control policies were overstated—much like John F. Kennedy's inaccurate assertions during the 1960 campaign against Richard Nixon about a "missile gap" between the U.S. and the Soviets.

During the 1980 campaign, Mr. Reagan painted a disturbing picture of unrestrained Soviet military spending, encouraged by U.S. weakness. He said in a January 1980 interview with the New York Times: "The Soviet Union is probably at the maximum of its ability to build armaments. They've already gotten their people down to the barest of necessities with regard to consumer products because all of their energy and wealth is being turned into armaments."

CIA analysts offered a very different picture last year when they revised their calculations of Soviet defense spending between 1977 and 1981. In testimony to the Joint Economic Committee, the CIA's deputy director for intelligence and top analyst, Robert Gates, explained: "Soviet expenditures have leveled off since 1976 in at least one major area, procurement of military hardware." He added that although total Soviet defense spending measured in constant dollars had continued to grow by just under 2% annually since 1976, this was less than the 3% growth rate during the 1966-1976 period.

Mr. Gates noted that the "slow growth" of Soviet military spending during the late 1970s probably stemmed in part from technological and managerial problems in the Soviet economy. But he added: "Decisions to comply with SALT I (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) and the unratified SALT II treaty also may have slowed the pace of procurement in certain areas."

"Whatever the causes of the procurement slowdown, strategic offensive weapons were produced and deployed at relatively relaxed rates after 1976," argues Mr. Kaufman.

Another Reagan defense theme that now seems questionable is his stress on U.S. strategic vulnerability. Mr. Reagan made this argument frequently during the 1980 campaign, in criticizing the SALT II treaty, and he repeated it during a news conference in February when he said that cutting the defense budget might "increase the window of vulnerability that we're trying to close."

## One-Sided Proposal

This worry about the vulnerability of U.S. ICBMs led the administration to propose, in mid-1982, an initial arms-control negotiating position that would close the "window" by requiring the Soviets to cut sharply their land-based missiles and warheads. The Soviets rejected what administration officials now concede was a one-sided proposal. As the negotiating morass deepened early last year, President Reagan asked retired Army Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft to assess U.S. strategic policies.

But the most startling finding of the Scowcroft Commission wasn't its support for the MX missile, but its polite rejection of the Reagan administration's views of ICBM vulnerability. "Although the survivability of our ICBMs is today a matter of concern," the report explained, ". . . it would be far more serious if we did not have a force of ballistic missile submarines at sea and a bomber force."

James Schlesinger, a commission member who had served in both Republican and Democratic administrations, summed up the commission's skepticism about one of the basic problems of the Reagan administration's arms-control policy: "I think it is important to avoid exaggeration on the vulnerability question."